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### **HAWAII'S LIVING REEF AWARENESS PROGRAM LAUNCHED**

HONOLULU — Hawaii's island lifestyle and economy depend on our coral reef ecosystem. That's the message now being launched in a major statewide public awareness program, "A Living Reef Gives our Islands Life."

A cross-section of community organizations, in partnership with a consortium of public and private agencies — including the Department of Land and Natural Resources — are involved in the "Living Reef" outreach program.

"Our goal is to help protect and nurture the coral reef ecosystem by reminding everyone — residents and visitors — how much our life in Hawaii depends on the living reef, whether we go near the ocean or not," explains Peter Young, DLNR chairperson.

"The ocean is part of the fabric of Hawaiian culture and history, and integral to our island lifestyle today, whether we are ocean enthusiasts or not. We, as individuals, are the only ones who can prevent further decline of this precious life-giving resource," he says.

Young says, "The designation of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands as a Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve, and news about the environmental and economic importance of our coral reefs has helped raise awareness in the state. We are now taking the next step with an overall public awareness program."

"We want to reach residents and visitors engaged in the amazing variety of ocean recreation available in the Islands. Everyone who enjoys ocean recreation and sports has a vested interest in preserving the reef, which creates surf breaks, diving and scuba opportunities and fishing," Young says.

"This entire program, from the initial research to its implementation is the result of a major collaborative effort. Meetings were held on all the islands to find out what the primary needs were, and public awareness came up as the number one issue," notes Athline Clark, special aquatic projects program manager for DLNR.

"A core group, called the Coral Reef Outreach Network or CRON, has been involved from the onset -- helping to create the logo and tagline to helping with the integrated advertising campaign. The key is this group's willingness to put time, money and their relationships into it. As a result, we have huge community-wide support," says Clark. "Our goal is to support the activities of other agencies and organizations to reach the greatest number of people with information on what they can do to help preserve our

living reef, and to show encouragement and appreciation of their efforts," she says.

"We hope our logo and tagline will become universally recognized as a reminder to all to take care of our precious coral reef ecosystem resource," Young adds.

Activities will include an educational outreach effort to businesses and services that impact the coral reef, an awards program to recognize significant reef nurturing activities, public displays, an Internet-based resource clearinghouse, activities for children, educational curriculum and materials for use in the classroom, advertising and a video for use on airlines and hotel rooms and other elements.

Young notes, "Among our major efforts will be to raise awareness of the fishing ethic, to take only what is needed."

"Many nearshore fish stocks in the main Hawaiian Islands have decreased in the past 100 years. This is due, in part, to the steady increase in the island populations and resulting strain on marine resources. Minimal information exists on the status of most reef fish populations. Fishing in Hawaii includes commercial, subsistence, and recreational fishing. Until recently, only data from commercial fishing has been comprehensively collected," says Young.

"Some people believe the use of the ocean is their inalienable right. We hope to preserve that use by teaching people to act more responsibly," Young says.

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